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SUBJECT: ZAPATERO WRITES TO DAMAS DE BLANCO

Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly, Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (SBU) Spanish leader Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero wrote a letter to Laura Pollan, representatives of the "Ladies in White" saying that Spain's engagement with the Cuban regime is aimed at raising human rights concerns, including release of the "Ladies'" husbands, who are political prisoners. Text of letter follows in paragraph 2 below:

12. Unofficial translation. Begin Text:

President of Government, 30 May, 2007

Dear Ms. Laura Pollan
Ladies in White
Havana

Dear Madam:

Thank you for your letter from the month of March in which you pass on your reflections on the human rights situation in Cuba, especially the matter of political prisoners.

Firstly, I would like to express to you my admiration for the courageous efforts carried out by the Ladies in White, which has earned international recognition, in the form of human rights awards.

The overall subject of human rights, and in particular the plight of all political prisoners in Cuba, is of constant concern to the Government of Spain in its policy toward the island. In our dialog with Cuban authorities, we transmit this concern repeatedly, every time we have a chance.

After the visit of the Foreign Minister to Cuba in April, Spain developed a permanent political consultation mechanism with Cuba, which includes a dialog on the subject of human rights, in which no matter is excluded a priori. The Spanish Government is convinced that the best way Spain can stay in tune with the Cuban people regarding decisions about their future is via a dialog with all sectors of Cuban society.

Please be assured that Spain desires the release of all and every one of the political prisoners. Our fundamental interest is to create a context propitious for the necessary changes to be able to obtain advances in this and other areas.

Reiterating to you the Spanish Government's recognition for your courage and dignity, please accept this as testimony to my deepest respect.

(Signed)

Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero
President of the Government of Spain
End Text

13. (C) Comment: The Damas de Blanco overall, and Laura Pollan in particular have told us that they feel let down by the Spanish initiative to engage the Cuban regime. Since Foreign Minister Moratinos' April visit, except for a small number of prisoners whose sentences were already completed, no Cuban political prisoners have been released. Additionally, the GOC has made new arrests and prison sentences under the same harsh laws and selective application of those laws that it used to arrest the husbands (or in some cases, brothers or other relatives) of the Ladies in White. Despite Spain's failure to obtain results, and the Cuban regime's public insults to the European Union regarding a human rights dialog in Brussels, we don't see European diplomats in Havana, and especially the Spaniards but also others, giving up on regime engagement.
PARMLY